

VZCZCXRO7054

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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3094
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 5397
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3125
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2990
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 3641
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHRC/USDA WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000843

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EEB
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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: THE OUTLOOK FOR TURKMENISTAN'S 2009 WHEAT
HARVEST

REFS: A) ASHGABAT 47; B) ASHGABAT 788

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: The wheat harvest in Turkmenistan is in full swing. Provincial governments expect to report their final production figures by the end of July. As in the past two years, the government has not released official statistics on the harvest. Unofficial reports suggest that yields were better than last year's due to better weather conditions, increased inputs and less interference on the part of state officials. The wheat harvest is expected to be completed by the end of July, with the nation-wide celebration of the Wheat Holiday during the last weekend of July. END SUMMARY.

FARMERS REPORT BETTER YIELDS

13. (SBU) According to Pol/Econ local staff's contacts from farming communities, yields are better this year due to a wet, rainy spring and better monetary incentives. To stimulate better production, in January 2009 President Berdimuhamedov increased state prices paid to farmers for wheat from \$56 to \$70 per ton (Ref A). Official reports claimed that the government increased inputs for wheat production by purchasing more pesticides and herbicides, providing better quality seed, cleaning existing irrigation canals and building new ones. A farmer from Serdar District of Balkan Province confirmed that the government built a new feeder canal to resolve the shortage of irrigation water in Serdar district. This contact also said that the government provided better quality seed of Kazakhstani varieties.

FARMERS FEEL LESS PRESSURE FROM THE GOVERNMENT

14. (SBU) Some farmers reported that, compared with the

Niyazov era, now they feel less pressure from state officials on issues such as the deadline for starting the harvest. (NOTE: In the past, President Niyazov personally set the deadline for the start of the harvest and required that despite different climatic conditions, all five provinces start the harvest on that date. This practice resulted in harvesting immature wheat that then rotted in the grain elevators. END NOTE.) Local observers claimed that this year, President Berdimuhamedov abandoned late President Niyazov's practice of personally controlling the harvest and made Deputy Chairman for Agriculture Myratgeldi Akmammedov responsible for the harvest. Also, Berdimuhamedov delegated Niyazov's practice of blessing the harvest by cutting the first stalks of wheat for the Elders' Council.

TURKMENISTAN'S WHEAT SELF-SUFFICIENCY DOUBTFUL

15. (SBU) Government media have not released official statistics on the harvest. Instead, it has posted success stories about farmers who achieved high yields. According to Minister of Agriculture Esenmurad Orazgeldiyev, the country's annual demand is 1,600,000 tons. During a June 22 meeting with The Charge, Deputy Chairman Akmammedov claimed that "Turkmenistan is one hundred percent self-sufficient and that the country does not import any wheat, due to efficient fertilizers, technology, and modern methods" (Ref B). However, local sources suggest that Turkmenistan needs 2,500,000 tons of wheat to meet the demand of its population for bread. In 2008, domestic production was

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estimated to be below 1,000,000 tons, and Turkmenistan imported flour from Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Less government interference in the harvest demonstrates that President Berdimuhamedov is taking steps to implement his words "to make farmers real owners of land." However, full implementation would mean a rejection of central command management, including the policy of state orders and fixed prices, and offering land to farmers for private ownership. So far, the government does not appear willing to take these steps. END COMMENT.

MILES